

## A Really Big Shew February 22

In 1949, the Army Security Agency (ASA) compiled a massive report detailing leaks that had occurred about the ASA's SIGINT activities in World War II, with recommendations in some cases for steps that could be taken to discourage any further leaking. Some revelations had occurred during the congressional hearings about the Pearl Harbor attack, but there also had been indiscreet remarks by former cleared individuals. The report listed some journalists and media people who had abetted the leaks—among them, Ed Sullivan.

Yes, that Ed Sullivan. In the 1950s and 1960s, he hosted one of the most popular television programs in the land, a sort of broadcast vaudeville.\* Before he became a TV celebrity, Sullivan had been a Broadway gossip columnist for a newspaper syndicate and had hosted a radio interview program. It was in the latter role that he drew ASA's ire.

Sullivan had interviewed Harry Shifman, a former officer assigned to the Central Bureau Brisbane (CBB), the cryptologic organization for the wartime Southwest Pacific Theater, and General George Kenney, the senior air officer for that theater of war. Shifman talked about cryptanalytic achievements in both Europe and the Pacific, and Kenney added a story about recovering Japanese codebooks from a sunken ship. The ASA report did not include a transcript of the discussions so it is impossible to know exactly what was said.

Shifman mentioned the story that, despite warnings from decrypts, the British had allowed the Germans to shoot down an airplane carrying a famous movie actor, to protect their source of information. Most cryptologic historians do not believe this story to be true, but at one time it was used as an example of the sacrifices necessary to protect SIGINT. *History Today* published an article on this in 2008, which is no longer available on the *Daily Enterprise* page; we are re-publishing it as today's *History Today Classic* so you can read a full discussion of this troubling accusation.

Shifman, not Kenney, was involved in the recovery of a Japanese codebook that had been dumped in a stream bed.\*\*



*CBB personnel drying codebooks recovered from a stream bed. COL Abraham Sinkov is bending over the oven in the right corner; we believe it. Shifman is watching with arms crossed.*

The ASA report cited the Sullivan program as one example of historical information leaking out, but it did not recommend any action against Sullivan, Kenny, or Shifman.

\*Sullivan was noted for a rather stone-faced delivery and a curious voice delivery of his introduction; he would often describe his schedule for the evening as a “really big show,” which got skewed by mimics imitating his mannerisms into “shew” [—](#)as witness the title of this article.

\*\* It is quite possible the ASA report confused who said what on the Sullivan program. The compiler’s carelessness is illustrated by the fact that General Kenney’s name was consistently spelled without the second “e.”

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508 caption: three or four uniformed men situated around a kitchen table, working with documents; in the background, three uniformed men, one of them Abraham Sinkov, are putting something in an oven. Beside the three, sitting casually on a second stove, arms crossed over his chest, is Harry Shifman.